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ABSTRACT

One use of television in the two-year college classroom is to help students to deal with inferences. An inferencing exercise that students have generally enjoyed is watching television for a certain length of time at home and taking accurate notes of the commercials. Then, each student pretends to be a space creature who has just landed and seen the same commercials. Using just the ads noted, each writes a letter (ostensibly from the space creature to its superior back home) telling what the earthlings are like. Another way that television has been useful is in setting up comparison/contrast situations. One activity is to have students audiotape a television news report of a particular event and then compare the treatment it received on television with its treatment in a local newspaper. Television can also be used for teaching about persuasion. Students need to be taught about what to watch and listen for. For example, being aware of color association (bright colors used in commercials, for example) is one way students can begin to "read" television--and the subject elicits various kinds of writing that students on all levels have something to say about. Television can also be used to explain film terminology and technique. Through activities such as these, college students can become television literate and avoid becoming victims of television--becoming so passive that they do not really want to take responsibility for their own learning. (HOD)

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CCCC Detroit, 1983

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THE BOOB TUBE AND COMMUNICATIONS COMPETENCIES

Films were originally made for entertainment. Then they were "discovered" by educators.

Computers are being touted as educational. But games are the big money-makers---and the reason most people are buying computers these days.

Television, almost from the beginning, has been a "fence straddler." There have been entertainment programs and educational program. There are even separate channels for entertainment and for education. But who's to say there really IS a separation between the two? I certainly don't believe there is (though sometimes I have a hard time convincing certain students of that viewpoint).

Students have been just as willing to go along with me on assignments and class work that relate to television as they have been to work with films. Unfortunately, both seem to be more appealing than books--as a source for discussion, as a

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springboard for writing, as ways to illustrate the principles I want to develop for a course.

I can certainly use the word "television" to illustrate how Latin and Greek roots and affixes have contributed to the development of English vocabulary. I can also use it to show that a language has the capacity to develop words that speakers of the language need. It's also been useful to talk about the implications of the various other names by which television is known: "the boob tube," "the idiot box," even "the vast wasteland."

But we know that the word is not the thing. So to keep myself honest, I have had to consider why I use--or wanted to use--television in the classroom. Not as a gimmick, certainly. That isn't my style of teaching. Not as a substitute, either. There is no sense in having one medium do what anothr can do better. At one time I thought of teaching ABOUT TV in our freshman English course; that would have been fun for me and possibly for my students. But that was in the era of big emphasis on media studies, and I was caught up in the excitement. Besides, I have a nagging conscience that says I ought to be conducting a class that has some relation to the catalog description of a course.

Many years ago I decided that teaching with--or about--television meant commercial TV. Therefore, my remarks today deliberately omit the individual program or the series that is made primarily for instruction and usually by a college or

university.

My first venture into teaching with television was the result of discovering Jerzy Kosinski's BEING THERE. It's a short novel and even weak readers found it didn't take too long to finish. Besides, students found the subject interesting. Because we were talking about the medium, I tried to use it as a teaching strategy.

First, I checked the local television listings to find out which programs were on during my various class hours. (This was in the days before videotape decks.) Then, I had to tailor my experiments to what I could tune in on, so obviously I couldn't use the same idea with each class. The easiest part was having a TV set brought into each classroom.

One idea I've used several terms but that I tried first in conjunction with BEING THERE is an attempt to get students to deal with inferences. We look at just one episode of a soap opera and people who aren't familiar with the program guess (on the basis of the situtation and dialogue) what has been going on, how the characters are related to each other, and what the story line is. Students who know the program act as "referees" and let us know when the inferences are accurate--or, they lead us to make correct ones.

An inferencing exercise that students have generally enjoyed is to watch TV for a certain length of time at home and take accurate notes of the commercials--what's advertised and how. Then, each pretends to be a space creature who has just

landed and seen the same TV commercials. However, they are the only bases the space creature has for understanding anything about the earthlings. Using just the ads noted, each person writes a letter (ostensibly from the space creature to its superiors back home) telling what the earthlings are like. (When MORK AND MINDY was on local TV, Mork was a big help as someone the writers could identify with.)

Another way that television has been useful is in setting up a comparison/contrast. One activity is to have students audio tape a television news report of a particular event (some technically oriented people with tape decks at home record it), then compare the treatment it received on TV with its treatment in a local newspaper. It gives something realistic to work with, and students begin to see how editorial choices are made--and how thosae choices influence public as well as private perceptions. This sort of comparison also provides a lesson in bias and slanting.

Of course, as English teachers, we can readily use television--and, particularly, TV advertising--for various language lessons. You may already be familiar with many materials designed to do so. The work of the NCTE Committee on Doublespeak has been particularly helpful. So have the "Intensify/Downplay" materials developed by Hugh Rank of that Committee.

We can also use TV readily for teaching about persuasion. Not just the ads, but the programming itself. The paragraph by

Nicholas Johnson in the handout has worked well to get people thinking about how TV persuades us in indirect as well as direct ways.

I began to discover that almost nobody in my classes knew much about how to "read" television. That is, the students don't have much notion about what to WATCH for, let alone what to listen for. And without being aware of how to attend to television, they wouldn't be aware of the effect that television can--or does--have on them.

Mention that the "lemon fresh Joy" commercials feature blonde people in yellow clothes and a yellow setting, however, and everybody in the class immediately perks up. There's a good reason why Madge, the manicurist whose customers soak their hands in Palmolive, wears a green uniform. Recently a new series of Florida Orange Juice ads started to appear on our local TV stations--and immediately students were aware of the intense orange hue to the commercials, even apart from the clothing colors the people in the ad wear. Being aware of color identification is one way students begin to "read" TV--and the subject elicits various kinds of writing tht students on all levels have something to say about, including how superior that informtion has made them feel.

Except for game shows and news programs, most of the TV we get is simply movies shown small. So for some years I have been doing a simple presentation on film terminology and technique and using the handout you have before you. I explain what a shot is

and how a film is built of shots that are related to make a scene and how a series of scenes makes a sequence. The movies I use in class are almost always single sequence films, so that notion is easy to grasp. We review camera terminology--tilts and pans and the effect of camera angles. (Imagine my gratification when some students came to class with complaints that in far too many shots in the WINDS OF WAR the camera looked up people's nostrils!) We talk a little about film conventions---among them why, when the wagon train is supposed to be heading west, it usually moves from right to left across the screen in front of us.

This relationship between film and television really struck me about two weeks ago when the most recent brochure of The American Film Institute arrived. Five of the six Faculty Development Workshops being offered this summer are on television--everything from production to documentation or researchers and librarians.

When Miami-Dade revised its curriculum several years ago, I wanted to try to fit into the new course some of the strategies involving television that had worked well. (You have the competencies for the course in the hand-out.) Because this first course is now required of all students, and because it is called "Communications" (rather than Composition), I decided to build my course around television. Certainly television is the most powerful communications medium students encounter and, thought they have grown up with it, most have not been particularly "TV literate." I thought that television was something they could

respond to for the personal writing competency, they could write informatively about it, and they certainly could demonstrate listening to it and pay attention to the speaking on TV. Therefore, in addition to the sort of individual strategies or exercises I have been describing, I decided to develop a term project for my students, one built around the notion of TV but which would encompass all the competencies they were supposed to be achieving. The result was the TV PROJECT ASSIGNMENT you have before you.

This very elaborate project was designed specifically to fit with the course competencies. The library work ties into a library orientation program we have and is preparation for te required research paper in the Composition course which follows this one; it is also meant to be part of the reading competency. The section on summaries is included because that skill is included among our competencies--and because few of my students can write a summary when they begin the course (and many still have trouble doing so by the end of the term). The interviews and oral reports were my way of accommodating the speaking and listening competencies of he course.

I learned a lot from this TV project. I learned, for example, tht almost half of every class watches DYNASTY--and loves it. I learned that TV news reporters--at least, those on our local stations--are regarded merely as readers of paper they are handed, not as the journalists they're touted as being. I learned that an astonishing number of students believe as

absolute truth almost everything they see on TV. I learned that a horrifyingly large number of students--and the people they interviewed--think the violence they see on TV is OK; they aren't concerned about it nor do they belive it has much effect on children (their own, included). I learned that students don't seem to care about those aspects of television I consider important: the influence of the medium, the manipulative power of programs, the fake laughter of sound tracks, the easy-money notion of the game shows, the graphic violence served up with dinner on the evening news. They do, however, care about who shot J. R. and about the power struggles that are the staples of evening soap operas, and about HILL STREET BLUES.

You may have noticed that I've been referring to this project in the past tense. After two years of using the project, I have discontinued it. At least until I devise a satisfactory revision. Too few of my students became TV literate. Not enough of them were willing to exert the energy the project asked of them. I saw depressingly little evidence that students had any interest in changing attitudes, no matter what they heard classmates present.

And so, I've gone back to depending on individual strategies that make use of television to achieve the competencies of our required Communications course. I use the films of Clio Award Winning Commercials and my own roll of old TV commercials spliced together from the films discarded by a local TV station. I still often use the sheet on "Basic Film Terms"

and sometimes have students create a storyboard for an imaginary commercial so we can find differences between the visual and the verbal--and why students need to strive for details and specifics in their composition.

I have mixed feelings. Sometimes I think the "boob tube" has won out and it has created, among other things, a nation of students so passive they don't really want to take responsibility for their own earning. Other times I am impatient with those who would indict the medium for all the ills of our students. I still think students ought to consider why LAVERNE AND SHIRLEY continues to be popular and why new episodes of such an intelligently written series as M*A*S*H will no longer appear.

Even MORE than either the moview or computers, television is so much a part of daily life that I think teachers need to find ways of using the medium to our own advantage. I keep looking for some of those ways.

Television not only distributes programs and sells products, it also preaches a general philosophy of life. Television tells us, hour after gruesome hour, that the primary measure of an individual's worth is his consumption of products, his measuring up to ideals that are found in packages mass produced and distributed by corporate America. Many products (and even programs), but especially the drug commercials, sell the gospel that there are instant solutions to life's most pressing personal problems. You don't need to think about your own emotional maturity and development of individuality; about discipline, training, and education; about your perception of the world; about your willingness to cooperate and compromise and work with other people; or about developing deep and meaningful human relationships and trying to keep them in repair. "Better living through chemistry" is not just DuPont's slogan. It's one of the commandments of consumerism.

Nicholas Johnson, TEST PATTERN FOR LIVING (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 41.

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BASIC FILM TERMS

shot: a single piece of film shown just as it ran through the camera

scene: a series of shots related because of location or action

sequence: a series of related scenes that form a natural unit

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tilt

pan

tracking or dolly shot

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long shot

medium shot

closeup

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zoom

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objective camera

subjective camera

TV PROJECT ASSIGNMENT

This project has many facets because it is designed to enable you to demonstrate your ability to meet Competency 1 (informational writing), Competency 2 (personal writing), parts of Competency 3 (reading), parts of Competency 4 (listening), and Competency 5 (speaking). You will be able to work on these competencies both as an individual and as a member of a group with your classmates.

The audience for your work will be your classmates and your instructor. However, only the instructor will read your log.

Please follow the EXACT ORDER of these various steps and thus help yourself to do the best possible work on this assignment. (Skipping sections or trying to do things out of order will only make it more difficult for you to complete the total project.)

TELEVISION is the general subject of this project. However, obviously you cannot undertake work on such a broad topic. Therefore, decide on ONE PARTICULAR ASPECT of television that you want to devote your study to. You may choose from among those areas listed below. Or, if you have a different idea, check with me for an OK on it.

politics on TV
children's programs
TV news
soap operas
portrayal of an ethnic group
portrayal of a religious group
influence of violence in programs
the family
traditional moral values
talk shows
advertising
ads for one kind of product
music
sports on TV
covering special events
language of advertising
persuasiveness of TV
free choice vs network programming
TV viewing habits

Obviously, these are all rather general and you will want to narrow your sights in relation to whichever topic you select for study.

The RESOURCES you use for this project MUST BE A COMBINATION OF PRINT (particularly, both periodicals and books), AND NON-PRINT. Among the latter should be television itself, as well as interviews, records,etc.

1. THE LOG.

You are to keep a personal log or record of ALL your activities related to this project. This is not a conventional kind of diary. Rather, each time you work on this project, record the amount of time you spent and what you accomplished. In addition, record in your log any comments, reactions, or responses to that particular segment of work. Always write in complete sentences when you work on your log.

EXAMPLE

> Tuesday, September 15 - 1 hour - I met with my group. We had trouble agreeing on the kinds of questions to ask. I still don't agree with their decisions, but will go along with the majority. After the group meeting I browsed through the card catalog looking at all the books on TV. I wonder how I will be able to pick two or three to work on.
>
> Wednesday, September 16 - 20 minutes - I found the books I will want to use and made the sketch right from the shelf. I'm no artist! I hope the teacher thinks this sketch is OK. I spent more time than I expected to just looking through the books to find . . .

YOU WILL FIND IT EASIER TO KEEP THE LOG REGULARLY THAN TO TRY TO RECONSTRUCT THE ENTIRE PROJECT AFTER SEVERAL WEEKS. **Keep this log in the notebook that you bring to class regularly. I may want to spot check it without warning.**

2. THE INTERVIEW.

Form a group with others in the class who are working on either the same or a related area. The group is to develop questions that will be the basis for a series of interviews you conduct in order to obtain responses from various people on your subject. You will give a short oral presentation on your findings and those responses will also form part of the bases for the final write-up of the project that you will do.

(Please check with me before doing any interviews or administering any questionnaires.)

3. PRINT RESOURCES.

In the card catalog of the campus library, locate at least three books on the subject of your study. If you cannot find entire books, find those which contain substantial information on your specific study. Also, use the card catalog to find out if there are any non-print resources on your subject available at the

campus and make note of those discoveries in your log.

Using various periodical indexes, locate at least three journal or magazine (NOT newspaper) sources on the subject.

Among your final resources should be interviews, TV programs or ads, and other non-print sources of information.

Compile a bibliography of the six sources of print information as well as whatever non-print sources you found on your subject. Use a standard alphabetical order such as you might use in a bibliography for a research paper. (For your own information, you should note the call number for each book you are using for this project and the location in the library of the periodicals you may need to refer to.)

4. SHELF LOCATORS.

On the basis of the information you have about the books and their shelf location, make a sketch showing the three books you are using and their location on the library shelf in relation to the several books around them. Please try to use books that are not next to each other on the shelf but are separated by at least one other book. Follow the plan for the sketch that will be given to you in class.

5. SUMMARIES.

Look through the three books you are using for this project and select from one of them a passage of AT LEAST 1000 words that is relevant to your study area and that you believe you can adequately summarize in no more than one page. Make a photo copy of the passage you have selected. (Be sure it is clear enough to read without excessive eye strain!) Write the bibliographic entry for this passage at the top of the first page of the photo copy.

On your own paper, write a summary of the passage in the photocopy; do not make it more than one page long in handwriting or about 3/4 page double spaced if you are typing. At the end of the summary, write a source acknowledgment in proper documentation form, except that you may omit the superscript number normally used with documentation.

Then, select a passage of AT LEAST 500 words from one of the periodical items listed in your bibliography. Make a clear photocopy of that passage and write a bibliographic entry for it at the top of the copy.

Summarize the passage from the periodical in no more than 1/3 page (1/4 page double spaced if you are typing); use your own paper. Write a source acknowledgment in proper documentation form at the end of your summary.

THESE SUMMARIES WILL BE GIVEN TO OTHER PEOPLE IN THE CLASS FOR EVALUATION OF THEIR ACCURACY AND ATTENTION TO THE CONVENTIONS OF WRITTEN ENGLISH.

6. DIRECTIONS.

Each person in the class will be assigned a starting location from which to write out, in sentences and paragraphs, instructions for a classmate to locate both the passage in the book and the one in the periodical so that an individual can find both of them ONLY by following your directions. Therefore, you will need to be VERY explicit in your writing and give as many details as possible, including landmarks along the way or other key, helpful information.

YOUR INSTRUCTIONS WILL BE GIVEN TO A CLASSMATE TO FOLLOW AND THEN EVALUATE.

These are the starting locations:
coke machines at 6000 building// south entrance to theater// room 6247// bench outside bars overlooking diving boards// bookstore entrance// handball courts// campus bus stop// English department office// office of the Bursar in 3000 building//central breezeway of the Masiko building// check-out desk of AV department// sculpture on the lawn southwest of 3000 building// room 8215// Fred Shaw Plaza// office of the art department//

7. ORAL PRESENTATION.

You will give a short, informal, oral report to the class noting your experiences fulfilling this assignment AND telling something of the content of what you discovered about your area of study from your reading and from interviews. You should make a clear and sufficiently substantial report that when the class is later asked questions about the report, everyone will be able to answer the questions. YOU MAY USE NOTES FOR THE ORAL REPORT, BUT YOU WILL NOT BE PERMITTED TO READ ANYTHING ALREADY WRITTEN OUT WORD FOR WORD.

8. CONCLUSIONS.

You will write a short essay about the subject you have been investigating. It may be a comparison and contrast of your perceptions on the subject before you began this investigation and after completing it. Or, your essay may take another form. Whatever organizational pattern you choose, you should include information on your informed perceptions about the aspect of television you have been investigating this term.

ENC 1131 -- COMMUNICATIONS

Communications emphasizes developing and applying the skills of informational and personal writing, active listening, efficient reading, and effective speaking.

Developing communications skills is, by its very nature, an ongoing process. The Communications course will establish the base for language skills to become more refined through continuing college experiences. Hopefully, all courses accept the responsibility of continuing to expand the communications skills of all students.

COMPETENCY 1: YOU WILL PRESENT INFORMATION IN WRITING ON A GIVEN SUBJECT*

CRITERIA: To achieve this competency, your writing must

a. fulfill the assignment.
b. have a central idea, single thesis or theme which is supported throughout with facts** or other information such as graphs, charts, pictures, tables or other visual aids.
c. contain adequate information to satisfy the assignment.
d. be organized.
e. be consistent in tense and person.
f. be directed to a specific audience for a specific purpose.
g. use language appropriate to the audience and occasion.
h. generally observe the conventions of Edited American English*** in sentence structure, grammar, spelling and punctuation.
i. use a standard form to document all phrasing and ideas from print and non-print materials.

COMPETENCY 2: YOU WILL PRESENT WRITING WHICH FOCUSES ATTENTION ON YOU AS A PERSON.*

CRITERIA: To achieve this competency, your writing must

a. fulfill the assignment.
b. reflect personal experiences, feelings and/or beliefs.
c. be unified.
d. contain adequate details.
e. have recognizable order.
f. be directed to a specific audience for a specific purpose.
g. use language appropriate to the audience and occasion.

COMPETENCY 3: YOU WILL DEMONSTRATE PROFICIENCY IN USING TECHNIQUES THAT INCREASE READING SKILLS.*

CRITERIA: To achieve this competency, you must

a. demonstrate the ability to adjust rate of reading to material and purpose for reading.
b. demonstrate ability to define words by examining context,

(more)

by using a dictionary and by applying the root-affix[+] method.

c. determine the main ideas (stated or implied) and supporting details (major and minor) in selected readings.
d. distinguish among facts, opinions and inferences in selected readings.
e. determine if readings show bias or use persuasive devices.

COMPETENCY 4: YOU WILL DEMONSTRATE PROFICIENCY IN ACTIVE LISTENING[++] TO OTHER PEOPLE.*

CRITERIA: To achieve this competency, you must

a. identify ways of overcoming internal and external barriers[+++] to listening.
b. identify main ideas and important details.
c. differentiate between fact and opinion, whether stated or implied.
d. demonstrate an understanding of a speaker's purpose and organization of material.
e. recognize that tone of voice, stress on words, pauses and other factors, including non-verbal ones, affect the reception of messages.

COMPETENCY 5: YOU WILL SPEAK EFFECTIVELY.*

CRITERIA: To achieve this competency, your speaking must

a. fulfill the assignment.
b. recognize audience and purpose when giving an impromptu or planned response.
c. contain selected and organized material.
d. use effective eye contact, voice volume, rate of speech, visual aids and other delivery techniques.
e. generally be expressed in clear, conventional American English.

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* Necessary adaptations will be made for the handicapped.

** Facts are statements that can be verified or documented.

*** Edited American English describes the writing we usually read in newspapers, magazines, textbooks, novels, pamphlets and other printed materials.

\+ The root-affix method of defining words is based upon knowledge of the roots, prefixes and suffixes that comprise English words derived from Latin and Greek. For example, the word semiannual is formed from the root annu and the prefix semi.

++ Active listening means that the listener accepts the responsibility of giving thoughtful attention to speakers.

+++ Internal barriers include such elements as your own fatigue, anger, apathy, hunger or stress while listening. External barriers include, but are not limited to, room temperature, noise, seating arrangements or speaker's gestures